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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN ELECTION #30: OAS LAUNCHES OBSERVER
MISSION

REF: SANTO DOMINGO 1823

11. (SBU) This is No. 30 in our series on the Dominican
presidential election:

OAS LAUNCHES ELECTION OBERVER MISSION

Senior advisor Santiago Murray kicked off the U.S.-funded Organization of American States (OAS) election observation mission during a March 15-19 visit to Santo Domingo. Murray serves in the OAS Unit for Promotion of Democracy. An Argentine, he has observed elections in 10 Latin American countries over the past decade, including the Dominican presidential contests in 2000 and 1996. The press played up his consultations with the Central Election Board (JCE) and President Mejia. Murray met the main opposition candidates, the USAID-funded NGO "Citizen Participation," the Monitoring Commission of civic notables, and diplomats. He gave the Ambassador an account of his week.

Murray's visit toned down complaints that OAS observers would be inadequate or that the international community (read USG) would provide insufficient support. Hours after Murray's March 19 departure, the Ambassador announced \$325,000 for the OAS effort during his speech at the Foreign Secretariat's Diplomatic School. Government-owned daily "Listin Diario" headlined this contribution in its report of the speech, which was mainly devoted to other issues (septel).

The U.S. contribution encouraged other donors. EU Ambassador Miguel Amado learned of it from the Ambassador at a March 17 lunch for Murray offered by the Spanish ambassador and offered an additional 80,000 euros (100,000 USD) from his locally available assistance funds. Canadian Ambassador Adam Blackwell at his March 17 reception for Murray make public a promise of RD \$1.5 million (31,000 USD) to upgrade equipment at the OAS office here that will serve as the observer mission's headquarters.

In his 30-minute meeting with President Mejia, Murray reported widespread concerns that Mejia's ruling PRD might attempt election fraud and that the President was using government resources for campaign purposes. Mejia flatly denied both allegations and offered "full guarantees and security" that there would be no electoral irregularities. He emphasized that he was campaigning with personal vehicles and other non-GODR resources. Murray was clear: if any such abuses are verified during the election process and not corrected, the OAS mission will speak out.

This came in a week when, almost daily, Mejia showed up in different provinces cutting ribbons on public works projects, from irrigation systems to housing. In the province of Azua alone, the works were valued at RD \$2 billion (40 million USD). Mejia told the press March 14 he had visited 22 of the nation's 29 provinces since the start of the campaign and claimed to be "ahead of my adversaries" in 20 of them. Most of these visits featured highly publicized inaugurations of local public works.

In his call on the Ambassador March 18 Murray praised U.S. support of his mission. The Ambassador reiterated the offer of any appropriate Embassy assistance to the mission. Murray assured us he would coordinate with any qualified international NGOs that might send observers, regardless of their funding sources, and with the Embassy throughout the election process. He raised the possibility that OAS SecGen Gavia might visit on election day. Murray expects the political atmosphere to get "tougher" in coming weeks, with the theme of low public confidence in the process, alleged partisan bias of the Central Election Board (JCE) and the controversy associated with Mejia's re-election bid, .

Murray plans to return for a week in mid-April with a team of

three technical experts (on computers, election logistics, and legal aspects). The OAS will establish eight international observers in different regions of the country. In early May, he will return and gradually build up to a team of 25 international observers. All will stay through election day and four or five days afterward to cover the vote count and any disputes. The OAS will conduct a "quick count" at the close of the polls and provide the results to the election authorities,

Earlier, Murray met at the Embassy with mid-level diplomats from 11 embassies and the UN and OAS offices here. Four more embassies were interested but could not attend, and we will keep them informed. Murray outlined his proposal to organize a group of diplomats to work as election observers on May 16 in coordination with the OAS mission. Murray said the OAS would send a formal invitation to all the missions to solicit from their staffs mid-level volunteers for election observer duty. Participants agreed that upon receipt of the invitations, the volunteers will send their c.v.'s to OAS Resident Representative Bertha Santoscoy. The OAS will arrange for observer credentials to be issued by the JCE. Murray committed to meet again with the diplomats and to conduct technical orientation for them.

12. (U) Drafted by Bain Cowell.

13. (U) This report and others in our election series are available on the SIPRNET at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/index.cfm> along with extensive other material.
HERTELL